

“Arab-German Brotherhood”: Understanding GDR-UAR Cooperation, 1960-1970

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Introduction

“Your visit to us, dear friend, was a visit of peace, hence it was a successful visit and it achieved gains for the Arab nation and for the great German nation for which we harbour every respect and appreciation. Despite all the obstacles, we try to side with this nation [...], and we look forward to the day when the imposed barriers are removed”¹

This is an excerpt from a speech given by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser at a dinner banquet celebrating the conclusion of German Democratic Republic (GDR) Chairman Walter Ulbricht’s successful state visit to the United Arab Republic (UAR)² in early 1965. The East Germans, seeking to challenge West Germany’s *Alleinvertretungsanspruch*, or claim as the sole representative of the German people, had launched a series of diplomatic offensives aimed at chipping away at the Federal Republic’s (FRG) position abroad. Using developmental aid, technical support and military equipment deliveries as its main tools, the GDR strove towards the ultimate prize: official diplomatic relations with as many nations as possible.³ Specifically, the GDR targeted non-aligned states, whose ostensible neutralism in the Cold War appeared to offer the greatest opportunity for foreign policy breakthroughs. Among these states, Nasser’s Egypt was most important, as the East German leadership hoped to create a recognition domino effect by courting the de-facto leader of the Arab people.⁴ This led to the formation of a special relationship that grew and deepened as both nations strove to improve their global position throughout the 1960s.

The degree of collaboration between these two nations, however, warrants deeper inspection, as a cursory overview finds few similarities. The two nations were geographically and culturally isolated from each other and seemed to be facing different problems. While the East Germans struggled to find their place in the world, the Egyptians held respectable sway in global and regional affairs as a key player in the Middle East and leader of the Arab Socialist Movement. On the other hand, while the UAR experienced the pains of economic slowdown and foreign policy reversals, stability increased within the GDR, benefitting from their pre-existing advanced economy and access to the Soviet sphere. Despite these

¹ Gamal Abdel Nasser, “Speech by President Gamal Abdel Nasser at dinner banquet given by Mr. Walter Ulbricht, Chairman of the Council of State of the German Democratic Republic in honor of President Nasser”, 1 March 1965. From Documentation Research Centre, *Arab Political Encyclopedia: Documents and Notes – 1965/66*. (Cairo, Egypt: National Publication House, n.d). 22-23.

² This essay will use the terms “UAR” and “Egypt” interchangeably, as the Egyptians continued to refer to themselves as the UAR even after Syria’s secession in 1961.

³ Steffen Wippel. *Die Aussenwirtschaftsbeziehungen Der DDR Zum Nahen Osten: Einfluß Und Abhängigkeit Der DDR Und Das Verhältnis Von Außenwirtschaft Zu Außenpolitik*. (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1996). 4.

⁴ Klaus Storkmann. *Geheime Solidarität: Militärbeziehungen und Militärhilfen der DDR in die “Dritte Welt”*. (Berlin: C.H Links Verlag, 2012). 185.

differences, however, the two states found that their weaknesses could be covered through mutual assistance. The goal of this paper is to explore the GDR-UAR relationship by investigating the hurdles both countries faced and how cooperation helped alleviate these concerns. During the 1960s, Cairo and Pankow grew closer as they sought to use each other's strengths in the pursuit of their national interests, which, despite inherent egotism, resulted in a robust partnership, with the GDR providing support for Egypt's foreign policy and economic development goals while the UAR used its platform to reinforce East Germany's bid for recognition.

The historiography of the East Germans in the developing world is somewhat well documented. Books such as Storkmann's *Geheime Solidarität* and Troche's *Ulbricht und die Dritte Welt* explore East Germany's many endeavors, with the former documenting advancements and changes in GDR foreign policy, while the latter explores the breadth of East German arms transfers to developing states throughout the Cold War.⁵ Furthermore, historians have shown greater specificity by conducting thorough investigations of the two German states' operations within the Middle East. Within Chubin's *Germany and the Middle East* collected volume, each author approaches German engagement with Arabs and Israelis through a unique lens, including topics like tech transfer and developmental policy.⁶ The most comprehensive work on the GDR-FRG competition for the Middle East is Gray's *Germany's Cold War*, which goes step-by-step through the diplomatic arms race between the two Germanies, exploring how they adapted to each other and the shifting landscape of the Cold War.⁷

Nevertheless, there is still room for growth. While the events of the East-West rivalry are thoroughly developed, the nuances of the individual relationships between the Germanies and their counterparts in the developing world are less pronounced. Excepting Israel, the literature includes very few examples of thorough investigations into specific relationships between the Germans and the developing world, instead opting for a big-picture approach focused on the role of developing nations within the Cold War's bipolar struggle.⁸ This lens

⁵ Alexander Troche. *Ulbricht Und Die Dritte Welt: Ost-Berlins "Kampf" Gegen Die Bonner "Alleinvertretungsanmaßung"*. (Erlangen: Palm und Enke, 1996).; Klaus Storkmann. *Geheime Solidarität: Militärbeziehungen und Militärhilfen der DDR in die "Dritte Welt"*. (Berlin: C.H Links Verlag, 2012).

⁶ Shahram Chubin. *Germany and the Middle East: Patterns and Prospects*. 1. publ. (London: Pinter Publishers, 1992).

⁷ William Glenn Gray. *Germany's Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949 - 1969*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

⁸ The German-Israeli relationship is among the few thoroughly fleshed out in the historiography. For example, see David Witzthum. "Unique dilemmas of German-Israeli relations: a political avoidance of tragedy" In *Germany and the Middle East: Patterns and Prospects*. ed. Shahram Chubin. 1. publ. (London: Pinter Publishers, 1992). 55-93.

of analysis partially skews our understanding of international relations during the Cold War, obfuscating the individual agency expressed by non-aligned, developing countries during the conflict; a trend that contemporary historians are working to rectify. This paper seeks to assist these efforts by recentring GDR-UAR cooperation on the explicit needs and goals of both nations, rather than the demands of the East-West rivalry.

Uncertain Futures: Hurdles to Success

For the GDR, their greatest concerns were related to the diplomatic isolation imposed upon them by the FRG. Since its foundation in 1949, the West German government sought to enforce its sole claim as the German people's representative on the world stage, even after the subsequent creation of the GDR later that year. To enforce this claim, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and Foreign Office State Secretary Walter Hallstein devised the "Hallstein Doctrine" in the mid-1950s. It was a set of unwritten principles that justified West Germany's foreign policy goal of restricting the state sovereignty of the DDR, arguing that, as the only German state to have carried out free and fair elections, the FRG represented the true voice of the German people. Furthermore, it stipulated that any attempts by third-party states to engage with or recognize the GDR would be viewed as, "an unfriendly act" towards West Germany, arguing that such an act was considered interference in German internal affairs and an acceptance of the unacceptable division of the German people.⁹ The Hallstein Doctrine created a diplomatic barrier between the GDR and the rest of the world.

The FRG's threats of retaliatory action proved effective in impairing East German recognition efforts. Between 1955 and 1963, the number of nations with official diplomatic relations with the GDR changed very little, rising from 11 to 13 while the FRG's nearly doubled, going from 53 to 98 in the same period.¹⁰ Worse still, in instances where the GDR succeeded in gaining ground, they were forced to contend with acts of sabotage, both material and non-material, from the West German state.

In the pursuit of delegitimizing the GDR, the FRG launched rhetorical attacks wherever possible. On the world stage, West Germany hammered the GDR on their lack of self-determination, condemning the lack of free elections and drawing attention to the

⁹ Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundestages, 2. Wahlperiode 1953, Stenographische Berichte, Bd. 26, S. 5643-5647. Found <https://www.konrad-adenauer.de/seite/22-september-1955/>; "BRD-Regierung zum Anerkennungsbestreben der sog. DDR", May 1959. From Wolfgang Schwanitz. *Deutsche in Nahost 1946 - 1965: Sozialgeschichte Nach Akten Und Interviews*. Vol. I. (Princeton: n.p., 1995). 376-377.

¹⁰ The number of East German trade offices around the world saw minor increases, though the conditions under which these agreements were signed were often dependent upon the severity of Bonn's reaction. See Gray. *Germany's Cold War*; 21, 148

incongruence of the Soviet Union's behavior in Eastern Europe to their rhetoric as supporters of national liberation.¹¹ Bonn refused to engage with the notion of the GDR, avoiding the term in most official documentation well into the 1960s and choosing instead to designate East Germany as the "Soviet Occupation Zone", emphasizing the role of the military and Soviet Union in suppressing the German people.¹² Those who fled the GDR were likened to subjects of political violence, arguing that the refugee status of those fleeing west was most akin to those forced to leave their homeland to escape political persecution.¹³ Furthermore, West Germany pressed the issue even in less important, but highly public areas. The question of under which flag East German Olympic athletes would compete became contentious, as the West German government viewed any participation under a symbol other than that of the FRG to be unacceptable.¹⁴ FRG representatives disparaged the quality of East German goods and their ability to fulfill orders in meetings with foreign business leaders, trying to dissuade them from cooperating with the GDR.¹⁵ In almost every area, Bonn pinpointed and attacked the GDR's legitimacy and emphasized their weaknesses, which were further exacerbated by the FRG's overwhelming economic advantages.

The GDR was completely outclassed economically. Despite nearly doubling its GDP during the 1950s, it still wielded an economy nearly eight times smaller than its West German rival.¹⁶ Furthermore, with only 108 thousand square kilometers of territory and few resource deposits outside of coal, the GDR lacked a strong foundation for rapid growth necessary to compete with the FRG economically.¹⁷ Worse still, their small population of around 17 million had experienced an extensive brain drain as 2.8 million people fled west between

¹¹ Gray. *Germany's Cold War*, 21, 103.

¹² For example, see "Erklärung der deutschen Bundesregierung vom 14. Juni 1967 zur Deutschland-Politik" *Bulletin des Presse- und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung*, Nr. 63, 15 June 1967. In *Dokumente zur Auswärtigen Politik: Verzeichnis der Dokumente Sach- und Personenverzeichnis Jahrgang 1967*. (Bonn: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik, n.d). D330.

¹³ This was an accurate description that also happened to serve a political purpose. Bundesrepublik Deutschland. 78. *Sitzung des Bundestages*. 19 June 1963. In *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundestages*, 4. Wahlperiode 1963, Stenographische Berichte, Bd. 53, 3811-3817.

¹⁴ Martin H. Geyer. "Der Kampf Um Nationale Repräsentation. Deutsch-Deutsche Sportbeziehungen Und Die 'Hallstein-Doktrin.'" *Vierteljahrshefte Für Zeitgeschichte* 44, no. 1 (1996): 71-72. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30195504>.

¹⁵ Katherine Pence. "Showcasing Cold War Germany in Cairo: 1954 and 1957 Industrial Exhibitions and the Competition for Arab Partners." *Journal of Contemporary History* 47, no. 1 (2012): 85. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23248982>.

¹⁶ "Entwicklung des Bruttoinlandsprodukts (BIP) in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik in den Jahren 1950 bis 1989" Statista Research Department. *Statista*. 1 September 2009.

<https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1055086/umfrage/einwicklung-des-bip-in-der-bundesrepublik-und-der-ddr/>

¹⁷ *Statistisches Jahrbuch Der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*. (Berlin: DDR Staatsverlag, 1965). XVI/1, 3.

1949 and 1961, a problem that was “solved” in 1961 with the erecting of the Berlin Wall.¹⁸ Due to the size of their economy and their reliance on the Soviet Union, the East Germans had to develop a unique method of providing aid to developing countries, which was one of the few ways the GDR could influence global affairs. Their support often took the form of barter agreements, wherein, instead of providing concrete loans or currency, the two states would agree to trade material goods of near-equal value.¹⁹

While sometimes passable, this strategy was competing with the FRG and its stronger economy. When GDR diplomats approached possible breakthroughs with non-aligned nations, the West Germans were quick to establish contact and offer support that the East could not match. This was the tactic employed by the FRG during the lead-up to the 1964 non-aligned conference in Cairo, which saw the West Germans offer large loans, commitments to development projects and favorable trade agreements to key countries in hopes of dissuading them from recognizing the GDR.²⁰ Beyond the weight of their economy, the FRG leveraged its greater access to technical expertise and advanced technology to win over developing economies.

During the 1950s and 60s, the FRG’s policy towards technology transfer was far less restrictive than their NATO counterparts. West Germany showed a willingness to cooperate with a wide variety of regimes in the developing world and argued against stringent export restrictions proposed by the West-oriented Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls.²¹ This policy struck a twofold blow to the GDR, as transfers entangled recipient countries more closely with the FRG economy while also demonstrating to the world the technical prowess of the Bonn government, a strength that the GDR struggled to replicate. In some instances, West Germany went on the offensive, using intellectual property laws to undermine the GDR. For example, during the 1954 Cairo Exhibition, an East German optics company, Zeiss-East, originally founded in Jena in the 20th Century, faced allegations of intellectual property theft from the FRG-based Zeiss-West who claimed the company’s legacy. This resulted in the confiscation of some of their goods and an overall increase in hesitancy among Egyptians considering partnerships with the GDR.²² These attacks, which

¹⁸ Andreas Grau, and Markus Würz. “Flucht und Notaufnahme.” Lebendiges Museum Online, Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 22 February 2016, <http://www.hdg.de/lemo/kapitel/geteiltes-deutschland-gruenderjahre/mauerbau/flucht-und-notaufnahme.html>

¹⁹ Jesse Ferris. “Guns for Cotton?: Aid, Trade, and the Soviet Quest for Base Rights in Egypt, 1964–1966.” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 13, no. 2 (2011): 10. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26923531>.

²⁰ Gray. *Germany's Cold War*, 165-168.

²¹ Harald Müller, “The Politics of Technology Transfer” In *Germany and the Middle East: Patterns and Prospects*. ed. Shahram Chubin. 1. publ. (London: Pinter Publishers, 1992). 155.

²² Katherine Pence. “Showcasing Cold War Germany in Cairo”, 84-85.

fused economic superiority and rhetorical belittling, were integral to the maintenance of the Hallstein Doctrine. They brought global attention to East Germany's inferiority while simultaneously shattering Pankow's legitimacy.

Bonn's Hallstein Doctrine posed the greatest obstacle to the GDR's foreign policy, forcing the East Germans to seek less direct solutions. Ulbricht's government, recognizing that a breakthrough required only a small number of relevant cooperative states, altered their strategy. Instead of attempting to beat the FRG everywhere, East Germany's foreign office focused their efforts on specific countries and regions. Giving higher quantities of resources to fewer partners enabled them to operate more efficiently while simultaneously garnering a stronger position from which to negotiate for official diplomatic relations. This strategy saw the greatest success in the Middle East, with Nasser's UAR becoming its cornerstone as the GDR seized on Egypt's developmental struggles to push forward its foreign policy agenda.

At the beginning of the 1960s, the UAR was experiencing growing pains. Whereas the previous decade had bestowed several successes on the young government, the 60s marked a turning point in the nation's luck. Nasser's prestige, despite his victory in the Suez Crisis and participation in the Bandung Conference, began to teeter. The first hit came with the secession of Syria from its short-lived union with Egypt in 1961, an event that dealt a serious blow to Nasser's reputation as leader of the Arab people.²³ Worse still, the UAR took a major gamble on the Arabian Peninsula, intervening militarily in 1962 in North Yemen's civil war in support of a military coup against the nation's imam. This endeavor, designed to be a quick victory and prestige project, rapidly evolved into a long-term quagmire that pitted the Egyptians against the Saudis in a regional proxy war. The five-year intervention, which killed 10,000 Egyptian soldiers and consumed millions of Egyptian pounds, had tremendous consequences for the nation. Within the Middle East, opinion of Nasser continued to plummet, as allegations of gas bombings against civilians in Yemen paired with the President's increasingly hostile rhetoric alienated fellow Arab states from his message of Pan-Arabism.²⁴ The peak of Nasser's decline, however, came in 1967. Between the Arab

²³ Fawaz A Gerges, "The Kennedy Administration and the Egyptian-Saudi Conflict in Yemen: Co-Opting Arab Nationalism." *Middle East Journal* 49, no. 2 (Spring, 1995): 295.
<https://www-1proquest-1com-1oovthxp505d8.erf.sbb.spk-berlin.de/scholarly-journals/kennedy-administration-egyptian-saudi-conflict/docview/1290792313/se-2>.

²⁴ For gas allegations, see "Communique of the United Arab Republic to the Members of the U.N.O. Refuting British Allegations About the Use of Gas Bombs", 3 August 1963. From Documentation Research Centre, *Arab Political Encyclopedia: Documents and Notes – 1963/64*. (Cairo, Egypt: National Publication House, n.d).; For the effects of Nasser's rhetoric, see Tewfik Aclimandos and Eugene Rogan. "The Yemen War and Egypt's War Preparedness" In *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences*. Edited by William Roger Louis, and Avi Shlaim. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). 150.

states' disastrous defeat in the Six-Day War against Israel, a loss that caused Nasser to temporarily resign from office, and the subsequent Egyptian withdrawal from North Yemen, the UAR's claim to leadership in the Middle East was pushed to its absolute limit.²⁵ The ramifications of these setbacks, however, expanded beyond the Middle East, spilling into the UAR's global standing. The UAR's precarity on the world stage only added more fuel to mounting domestic troubles.

On the home front, Nasser's administration was struggling to keep afloat. Their military operations were, an Egyptian minister described, "an unwelcome burden to a developing country", as the struggling economy exhausted its reserve of foreign currency while simultaneously taking on considerable debts.²⁶ Furthermore, their intervention in Yemen proved quite expensive for the state budget, with defense expenditures exceeding \$400 million, approximately 8% of the nation's GNP, in 1966.²⁷ Before reaching the height of their military spending, however, the economy showed signs of weakness. The lack of access to foreign currency and raw materials caused the factories to underperform and growth to slow, all while Cairo's trade deficit grew worse, with the value of Egypt's imports exceeding their exports by over \$410 million in 1964.²⁸ Attempts to improve their deficit, such as the 1964 import curbs and tax increases, hit the developing Egyptian industry hard while simultaneously causing consumer goods prices to increase sharply.²⁹ Worse still, after a series of vitriolic speeches aimed at the US, the Johnson administration announced in early 1965 the suspension of food aid to Egypt, threatening to cut the nation off from its largest supplier of food.³⁰ Though a rapid diversion of wheat from the Soviet Union and the last of US-withheld grain staved off famine, the scramble indebted the government further to the Soviet Union and forced the nation to grapple with the prospect of purchasing essential foodstuffs at market prices.³¹ The poor economic outlook, beyond posing a major hurdle to Egyptian development

²⁵ Jesse Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013). 295.

²⁶ The National Archives of the UK: FO 371/174482/87972

²⁷ Central Intelligence Agency. *Intelligence Estimate: The Outlook for the United Arab Republic*, 19 May 1966. Secret. NIE 36-1-66.

<http://primarysources.brillonline.com/browse/us-intelligence-on-the-middle-east/cia-intelligence-estimate-the-outlook-for-the-united-arab-republic-may-19-1966-secret-cia;umeoumeob03097> [CIA, *Outlook for the UAR*]

²⁸ Ali Abdel Rahman Rahmy. *The Egyptian Policy in the Arab World: Intervention in Yemen, 1962-1967: Case Study*. (Washington, D.C: University Press of America, 1983).

²⁹ CIA, *Outlook for the UAR*

³⁰ Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 138-140.

³¹ Central Intelligence Agency: Directorate of Intelligence. *Intelligence Brief: Soviet Wheat for the UAR*, 1 July 1965. n.a. CIA-RDP79T01003A002300130001-1

<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp79t01003a002300130001-1>

plans, created domestic instability, as the average citizen took notice of their nation's declining state.

Economic woes translated into social discontent. With consumer prices skyrocketing, black markets cropped up throughout the country, while workers engaged in sporadic strikes and malcontents launched small-scale riots against the government.³² Despite being a military dictatorship, much of Nasser's legitimacy rested on his domestic popularity. Public approval was key to ensuring the regime's survivability, with foreign intelligence officials recognizing favorability with the Egyptian people as a necessary characteristic for would-be successors to the President and that the lack of a suitable candidate ensured that Nasser would remain in charge despite his many setbacks.³³ Though a mass revolt seemed unlikely, leaders in Cairo watched domestic developments with great concern, and, remembering their rise to power in 1952, kept a watchful eye for the possibility of a coup.³⁴ These fears were heightened further in mid-1965 when Egyptian security forces uncovered a coup plot by the Muslim Brotherhood that had become significantly advanced.³⁵ Seeking to at least secure their military powerbase, leaders offered soldiers, especially those who served in Yemen, several bonuses in exchange for their loyalty. For example, soldiers serving in Yemen were able to import Western goods duty-free into the country, received higher wages than their counterparts and had priority in selection for government jobs and access to universities.³⁶ These programs, contrary to their goal, increased tensions, as Egyptian citizens witnessed what historian Jesse Ferris describes as a "ubiquity of small-scale abuses by thousands of individuals", which showcased the material benefits afforded to soldiers during a time of increased austerity and revealed government corruption.³⁷ The social unrest in the UAR, while not regime-ending, combined with economic woes and declining global prestige to impede Nasser's plans for developing the nation. It was these issues that caused the Egyptians to seek external assistance, culminating in their fruitful relationship with the GDR.

Allies of Convenience: Trading Economic Aid for Political Support

³² CIA, *Outlook for the UAR*

³³ Central Intelligence Agency: Directorate of Intelligence. *Intelligence Memorandum: The Present Situation in Egypt*, 8 September 1967. n.a., EO 13292 Sec 35 NLJ/RAC 06-102. Austin, TX: Lyndon B. Johnson Library, 2006.

<http://primarysources.brillonline.com/browse/us-intelligence-on-the-middle-east/cia-memorandum-the-present-egyptian-situation-november-8-1967-secret-lbjl;umeoumeob03284>

³⁴ Ferris. *Nasser's Gamble*, 209.

³⁵ CIA, *Outlook for the UAR*

³⁶ Rahmy. *The Egyptian Policy in the Arab World*, 246-247.

³⁷ Ferris. *Nasser's Gamble*, 203.

The GDR-UAR relationship was predicated on each nation's ability to assist with, if not solve, the issues of the other. The GDR, residing in the shadow of the much stronger FRG, was attempting to break the Hallstein Doctrine's diplomatic encirclement and achieve global recognition. The Egyptians, on the other hand, were in desperate need of economic assistance and foreign investment, as their regime's ability to project power abroad and maintain peace at home was faltering. Attempts to solve their national concerns led these two countries to begin cooperating, as they each found the other capable of ameliorating their problems. Starting with the UAR, the GDR proved quite capable of assisting with Egyptian economic development.

Starting in 1961, East German developmental aid achieved \$27.2 million, making the young republic the seventh-largest donor country in the region and the second-largest within the Eastern Bloc's aid organization, the Council for Mutual Cooperation.³⁸ Later, as the UAR-FRG relationship began to fray, the GDR increased the size of their aid, nearly doubling to \$50 million in the weeks leading up to Walter Ulbricht's 1965 visit and reaching a high point of \$92 million by 1970.³⁹ GDR aid took the form of upfront investments of finished goods into the Egyptian economy. For example, East German was responsible for delivering cotton spinning equipment to developing textile industries, including 100,000 spindles to one of the UAR's most critical cotton spinning mills in Sibir el-Kom.⁴⁰ These tools went into developing local manufacturing, the proceeds of which were to be paid back to the Germans. These investments were critical to Nasser's developmental plans, as the UAR pursued a strategy of import-substitution industrialization. This strategy foresaw the development of domestic manufacturing industries, producing quality jobs and finished goods within the local market, subsequently raising development and reducing foreign dependencies.⁴¹ Thus, the GDR's machine parts were critical to the creation of local industries, simultaneously assisting the stumbling economy and directly contributing to Egyptian development plans. Beyond the economic value of East German investments in Egypt, however, was the maneuverability afforded to the Egyptians during negotiations.

³⁸ The top donor country was the Soviet Union. Wippel, *Die Außenwirtschaftsbeziehungen der DDR zum Nahen Osten*, 17.

³⁹ Gray, *Germany's Cold War*, 172.; Wippel, *Die Außenwirtschaftsbeziehungen der DDR zum Nahen Osten*, 21.

⁴⁰ Walter Ulbricht, "Über den Freundschaftsbesuch in der Vereinigten Arabischen Republik - 23 Februar 1965" Interview by Al Ahram Newspaper. In *Dokumente zur Außenpolitik der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik - 1965*. (Berlin: DDR Staatsverlag, 1969). 843. [Walter Ulbricht, "Freundschaftsbesuch" Interview]

⁴¹ This strategy did not work for the Egyptians. Thomas Scheben, "Wachstumsstrategien im Nahen Osten während des Kalten Krieges" In *Ökonomie im Kalten Krieg*. ed. Bernd Greiner, Christian Th. Müller and Claudia Weber. (Hamburg: HIS Verlagsges, 2010). 140-141.

Another advantage for the UAR was East Germany's flexibility and desire to accommodate the needs of the Egyptian government. During a meeting on 26 February 1965, Ulbricht offered Nasser broad access to all the GDR had to offer, stating, "We are ready to show you everything what you will want to know."⁴² Conscious of the GDR's desire for recognition, Cairo often used the bait of diplomatic relations as a tool for coaxing more aid from isolated East German state. In practice, this led to a diversification of investments, with the GDR pledging to assist the UAR along the lines of their five-year plans and subsequently funneling capital into petroleum refineries and chemical industries.⁴³ Furthermore, the UAR knew how to press this advantage in desperate situations. After the destruction of the Egyptian military during the Six-Day War, Nasser continued to deny GDR recognition despite already generous donations of military materiel, instead shrugging off the question of diplomatic relations and demanding further aircraft shipments.⁴⁴

An indirect benefit of cooperating with East Germany, beyond simply receiving economic assistance, was the opportunity to manipulate the East-West relationship to better serve the interests of Cairo. This flexibility extended even beyond GDR-UAR relations, influencing Cairo's relationship with West Germany. The Egyptians took advantage of West Germany's fear of driving potential partners towards the GDR and Soviet sphere to extract financial rewards.⁴⁵ For example, despite maintain several sub-diplomatic relationships with East Germany, Bonn's concerns regarding full recognition kept them from making moves against Cairo, enabling the Egyptians to receive developmental aid from Bonn to the tune of 759 Million DM (~190 million USD) in the lead up to 1965.⁴⁶ By playing both sides, the developing nation received millions in foreign aid without directly giving up any sovereignty by acquiescing to a single power.

In addition to direct assistance, Nasser also found the GDR to be quite willing to invest in UAR's human capital by lending expertise. The East Germans provided opportunities to learn at their facilities, which was demonstrated during UAR Minister of Education El Sayed Youssef's visit in April 1966. During this visit, Youssef was given access

⁴² "Memorandum of a Conversation between Walter Ulbricht, Chairman of the State Council of the GDR, and Gamal Abdel Nasser, President of the United Arab Republic, on 25 February 1965, 12:30-14:30", February 25, 1965, Wilson Center Digital Archive, BA-SAPMO J IV 2/2J/1398. Translated by Bernd Schaefer. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111456>

⁴³ Walter Ulbricht, "Freundschaftsbesuch" Interview, 844

⁴⁴ Storkmann. *Geheime Solidarität*, 197.

⁴⁵ Gray. *Germany's Cold War*, 120-121.

⁴⁶ "Die Beziehungen zwischen Ostberlin und Kairo" *SBZ Archiv: Dokumente, Berichte und Kommentare zu gesamtdeutschen Fragen*. February 1965. In *SBZ Archiv: 16. Jahrgang 1965*. (Köln: Verlag für Politik und Wirtschaft, n.d). 35. Converted using Lawrence H. Officer, "Exchange Rates Between the United States Dollar and Forty-one Currencies," *MeasuringWorth*, 2024. <http://www.measuringworth.com/exchangeglobal/>

to a variety of educational institutions across many fields, from the Polytechnical Institute Espenhain to the German Institute for Physical Culture and Fitness Leipzig, during which time aspiring UAR students were given the opportunity to meet with school administrators.⁴⁷ From 1960 to 1970, between five and eight percent of the foreign students studying at the GDR's Herder Institute came from the Middle East, with the Egyptians sending the second-highest number of students at 280 during that timeframe.⁴⁸ For those workers and experts who studied within the GDR, the costs of their education were almost entirely financed by the East German government, making it a costless offer for those qualified.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the GDR sent technicians and educators to Egypt itself, opening cultural centers in Cairo and Alexandria in 1965 and 1967 respectively, which offered language and cultural preparatory courses for those seeking to study at East German universities.⁵⁰ East German technical expertise was not, however, purely relegated to peaceful development efforts.

Like their cooperation in civic education, the GDR provided the UAR military with an assortment of expertise. They supplied the UAR with engineers for the development of their ground-to-ground missile program during the 1960s.⁵¹ Military officers were permitted to study in East Germany, with an Egyptian Major training with K9 officers and border police in the autumn of 1965, which led to subsequent requests for Egyptians to study at GDR military academies and combat flight schools.⁵² The largest influx of military support came, however, after the Egyptian defeat in the Six Day War. Following the UAR's defeat, the GDR offered Cairo 80 million Marks, (~\$20 million) in military assistance and agreed to train 300 new officers in advanced weapons systems at East German military academies.⁵³ These deliveries included approximately 10,000 infantry weapons and 90 artillery pieces, with further pledges to provide more goods and training officers in the future.⁵⁴ Furthermore, some aid shipments came in the form of donations, rather than loans. In the immediate aftermath of

⁴⁷ El Sayed Youssef, "Kommuniqué über den Besuch des Ministers für Erziehung der Vereinigten Arabischen Republik, in der DDR", 23 April 1966. In *Die Deutschen und die arabischen Staaten: Dokumente 1956-1992*. ed. Wolfgang and Angelika Bator. (Berlin: DDR Staatsverlag, 1984). 105.

⁴⁸ The Egyptians sent the ninth most students between 1951 and 1981. See Martin Praxenthaler. *Die Sprachverbreitungspolitik der DDR: Die Deutsche Sprache Als Mittel Sozialistischer Auswärtiger Kulturpolitik*. (Frankfurt am Main: Lang Verlag, 2002). 223-225.

⁴⁹ Wippel, *Die Außenwirtschaftsbeziehungen der DDR zum Nahen Osten*, 16.

⁵⁰ Praxenthaler, *Die Sprachverbreitungspolitik der DDR*, 260

⁵¹ The East Germans were not the only ones to work in this program. It included Austrians, Spaniards and West Germans, see Tilman Ludke, (2022). The Org. Gehlen/BND and German military and civilian experts in the Middle East in the 1950s and 1960s. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 59(5), 797. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2022.2130897>

⁵² Storkmann. *Geheime Solidarität*, 187.

⁵³ "Araber vermeiden vorerst Anerkennung." *SBZ Archiv: Dokumente, Berichte und Kommentare zu gesamtdeutschen Fragen*, August 1967. In *SBZ Archiv: 18. Jahrgang 1967 – 19. Jahrgang 1. Vierteljahr 1968*. (Köln: Verlag Kiepenheuer und Witsch, n.d). 225.

⁵⁴ Storkmann. *Geheime Solidarität*, 189-192.

their defeat, equipment arriving in Egypt came at no cost to Cairo, while the GDR fully paid the wages of the officers and technicians it sent to support and rebuild the crippled military.⁵⁵ For the Egyptians, East Germany proved to be among the most supportive nations in the effort to bolster and rehabilitate their military, which further cemented the value of GDR-UAR cooperation for those in Cairo.

In exchange for their cooperation with the Egyptians, Pankow reaped mostly non-material rewards, chief among them was legitimacy. The GDR's policy of providing aid and increasing trade relations with the developing world was integral to their overarching strategy of global recognition. Through trade agreements and aid dispersal, the GDR sought to deepen its connection to the global community while simultaneously undermining the West German Alleinvertretungsanspruch.⁵⁶ In 1965, Walter Ulbricht articulated this position clearly during a press interview, referencing their trade commissions and consulates abroad as forms of "government-to-government" connections outside of explicit diplomatic relations.⁵⁷ Each friendship treaty marked another opportunity for the GDR to chisel away at the Hallstein Doctrine. The UAR was key to this effort, as they were among the most willing to play along with, and benefit from, Pankow's strategy.

For the East Germans, Nasser's propensity for prestige politics, as demonstrated by his unwillingness to bow to West German demands, made him an advantageous partner. When the UAR invited Walter Ulbricht in 1965, West Germany attempted to punish the Egyptians by threatening to sever financial aid, which Nasser quickly rebuked. He instead gave a speech, in which he aggressively described the FRG as neocolonialists while asserting, "No one was able to punish us, and no one shall be able to do so!"⁵⁸ Furthermore, after Bonn threatened to recognize Israel, Cairo retorted with the reciprocal threat of recognizing the GDR, demonstrating further defiance towards the West Germans.⁵⁹ These incidents highlight the value that the Egyptians granted to the GDR during their quest for recognition. The

⁵⁵ Jeffrey Herf, *Undeclared Wars with Israel: East Germany and the West German Far Left, 1967-1989*. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016). 49.

⁵⁶ Gray, *Germany's Cold War*, 27-28.

⁵⁷ Walter Ulbricht, "Rundfunk- und Fernsehinterview über Verlauf und Ergebnisse des Staatsbesuches in der Vereinigten Arabischen Republik – 7 März 1965" Interview by Prof. Gerhard Eisler. In *Dokumente zur Außenpolitik der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik – 1965*. (Berlin: DDR Staatsverlag, 1969).877-878.

⁵⁸ Gamal Abdel Nasser, "Address by President Gamal Abdel Nasser at the Arab Socialist Union Popular Rally in Assiut University", 8 March 1965. From Documentation Research Centre, *Arab Political Encyclopedia: Documents and Notes – 1965/66*. (Cairo, Egypt: National Publication House, n.d). 31. [Nasser "Assiut University Address"]

⁵⁹ Gamal Abdel Nasser, "Address by President Gamal Abdel Nasser at the Popular Rally held by the Arab Socialist Union at Shebin El-Kom in the Menufia Governorate", 10 March 1965. From Documentation Research Centre, *Arab Political Encyclopedia: Documents and Notes – 1965/66*. (Cairo, Egypt: National Publication House, n.d). 47.; In practice, the UAR did not recognize the GDR after the FRG and Israel established relations, instead calling for most of the Arab world to sever their diplomatic relations with Bonn.

strength of the UAR's defiance provided a clear example of a state in the developing world successfully resisting West German foreign policy while simultaneously demonstrating Bonn's trouble with properly punishing rulebreakers. Each instance of resistance to the Hallstein Doctrine forced Bonn to show their hand and, if they could not respond properly, their weakness. Such public displays brought global attention to the inconsistency of the Hallstein Doctrine, whose enforcement was becoming far less viable and varied wildly between targets.⁶⁰ For the East Germans, a huge benefit of cooperating with the Egyptians was having a respected voice on the global stage that ostensibly supported the cause of the GDR. Pankow could rely upon Cairo to criticize the FRG while acting as a potential role model for other non-aligned states to follow.

Another broad benefit of cooperation with Cairo was the diversification of angles of attack against Bonn. Middle Eastern affairs became a legitimate theater for addressing the German question, as GDR and UAR squared off against the West German-Israeli special relationship, with each incident presenting a new vector of attack. During the Six Day War, Pankow accused Bonn of using their atonement efforts with Israel as a mechanism for providing weapons used to kill Arabs in support of imperialism.⁶¹ Furthermore, cooperation with the Egyptians helped amplify their criticism of the FRG, with the UAR often magnifying and reinforcing the East German perspective. For example, Nasser specifically targeted West German atonement efforts during a 1965 speech, using a performative whataboutism about Eastern European Jews to denounce Bonn's alleged treachery.⁶² These talking points, beyond simple disparagement, created a new propagandistic tool for the GDR, who immediately followed suit with these types of attacks, following this line of attack nearly verbatim in an interview later that year.⁶³ This political support was pivotal to East Germany's strategy for breaking the Hallstein Doctrine. For the GDR, cooperation with Cairo was profitable, not because it generated material wealth, but because it lent Pankow much-needed legitimacy, for which they were willing to pay steep economic prices. For breaking their isolation, they relied upon continuing to build out their relations beyond

⁶⁰ Gray. *Germany's Cold War*, 182-184.

⁶¹ Walter Ulbricht. "Rede des Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Walter Ulbricht, auf einer Wählerversammlung in Leipzig zu Fragen der Lage im Nahen Osten und zur westdeutschen Expansionspolitik im Rahmen der USA-Globalstrategie", 15 June 1967. In *Dokumente zur Außenpolitik der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik – 1967*. Vol. I. (Berlin: DDR Staatsverlag, 1970). 519.

⁶² Nasser "Assiut University Address", 30.

⁶³ Walter Ulbricht, "Über die Beziehungen der DDR zu den arabischen Staaten und die Lösung der deutschen Frage – 21 August 1965" Interview by Akhbar el Yom Newspaper. In *Dokumente zur Außenpolitik der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik – 1965*. (Berlin: DDR Staatsverlag, 1969). 911-912

Europe and each partner that was willing to lend support in any form to the cause of diplomatic recognition represented another step forward.

Conclusion

In their essay in the collected volume *East Germany in Africa*, Depta and Hartmetz describe the GDR-UAR relationship thusly, “Solidarity between the GDR and Egypt is perhaps better understood if it is seen not so much as political or economic altruism. Both states were interested in meeting at eye level and wanted to benefit from the exchange.”⁶⁴ This observation captures succinctly the essence of these two states’ cooperation. The Egyptians were suffering from a stumbling economy and military setbacks, which the GDR generously helped ameliorate with developmental assistance and technical expertise designed to stave off economic collapse, even as the situation in the UAR worsened. In exchange for their hefty investment, the GDR received a partner on the world stage, one which opened new avenues for participation in the discourse of global issues and helped to undermine the Hallstein Doctrine, which brought them one step closer to diplomatic recognition and parity with West Germany.

Acknowledging the GDR-UAR relationship sheds light on the agency expressed by non-superpowers during the Cold War. Both nations manipulated the Cold War bipolarity for their national interests. For the GDR, the Middle East served as a theater in which it could differentiate itself from the Soviet Union, expressing a degree of autonomy that distinguished it from the bloc leader.⁶⁵ The UAR, however, expressed agency by playing both sides of the field. Their collaboration with both East and West Germany continued a long-held tradition of the Egyptians maneuvering between foreign powers towards the fulfillment of domestic and foreign policies.⁶⁶ In the case of both nations, however, their friendship provides an example of North-South relations in a discourse that has been largely focused on the East-West competition of the Cold War. Furthermore, the discussion of non-superpower actors and their activities offers insight into the dynamism of the Cold War, enriching our understanding of the events and adding additional complexity to the subject.

⁶⁴ Jörg Depta and Anne-Kristin Hartmetz, “Herder vs. Goethe in Egypt: East and West German Language Courses in Cairo and the Evolution of ‘German as a Foreign Language’ (DaF)” In *Navigating Socialist Encounters: Moorings and (Dis)Entanglements between Africa and East Germany during the Cold War*. ed. Eric Burton, Anne Dietrich, Immanuel R. Harisch, and Marcia C. Schenck. Vol. II. (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter GmbH, 2021). 83.

⁶⁵ Wippel, *Die Außenwirtschaftsbeziehungen der DDR zum Nahen Osten*, 27.

⁶⁶ Thomas Scheben, “Ein Bündnis mit begrenzter Haftung: Ägypten im Kalten Krieg” In *Heiße Kriege im Kalten Krieg*. Edited by Bernd Greiner, Christian Th. Müller, und Dierk Walter. 1. Edition. (Hamburg: HIS Verlagsge, 2006). 414.

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